

## E-Ernest 102 Squadron Mission 7 Target ROSTOCK

PILOT Jack Worthing Pilot Officer  
FLIGHT ENGINEER Algy Moncreif Flying Officer  
NAVIGATOR Cecil Cardew Flight Sgt  
BOMB AIMER Gwyn Fairfax Flying Officer  
WIRELESS/GUNNER Fraser Wilson Flight Sgt  
MID UPPER GUNNER Henry Lane Flight Sgt  
TAIL GUNNER Mitch Prism Flight Sgt

5th April 1942

Unfortunately E Ernest is still being repaired following the fires on the Dortmund raid 3 nights ago so we will have to take the resident hangar queen O Oscar for tonight's little jaunt. Fraser Wilson our replacement WT Operator was bourne aloft on our shoulders to go and kiss the "cookie" loaded in the bomb bay for tonight's mission as per our established ritual induction. At 21 this makes him the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest member of the crew. With his dark wavy hair and raffish smile he has already made his number with the WAAFs around the station. Despite his Scottish name he is from Barnsley in the West Riding and has the broadest Yorkshire accent I have ever heard except when he is on the R/T when he has the best BBC received pronunciation imaginable. 10 minutes before briefing the CO lumbers us with a spare bod, Flying Officer Peter Pascoe who is coming along for his familiarization flight prior to him taking B Bobby and his new crew on the next mission.

So the target for tonight is Rostock and the Heinkel and Arado factories, well at least most of it is over water. When the time comes we collect our parachutes, sandwiches, flasks and the relevant silk escape maps from the WAAFs prising Fraser away from each one of them in turn and jump aboard the lorry out to dispersal. Fraser tries to ask Betty the WAAF driver out for a date – fat chance! I know for a fact that she makes it an iron rule not to date any of the flying crew as she finds it heartbreaking enough to be the last person many of us will see in this world.

Whilst everyone was sorting out there office I let FO Pascoe take me through the pre-flight checks to settle his nerves. This was to be his first flight over enemy territory and from his questions about flak and nightfighters I could see he was getting the wind up. "It's the unknown that's bothering you." I told him, "Once you've had a taste of it for yourself and come through you'll be as right as rain." I lied.

Right time for take off. Weather is good and we are the 5<sup>th</sup> ship to trundle down the tarmac "somewhere in England" as the reporters like to say. Doing my best to impress FO Pascoe and with such a heavy fuel load I ease O Oscar smoothly into the night sky.

We make altitude and arrive at the assembly point dead on time. Despite her reputation O Oscar seems to be mechanically sound although she is definitely showing her age. No contrails as we head out over the North Sea and even with the full moon no bandits lurking amongst the 50% cloud. Fraser comes over all "ee by gum" as he spots the Humber Estuary far off to Port. "Permission to test our guns Skipper?" asks Mitch from the tail. "Go ahead."

Skirting well to the North of the Dutch coast the weather remains unchanged but contrails start to form. "How's the frostbite Parky?" I ask the mid upper gunner who seems to be none the worse for wear after his last op. "Fine skipper. Although you could ask room service to ...

BREAK RIGHT! BREAK RIGHT! Bandit at 3 o'clock high." The shadowy silhouette of a Do217 is briefly visible but either he doesn't see us or our violent avoiding action puts him off because he fails to attack. FO Pascoe finds the corkscrewing action the last straw and is promptly and copiously sick. "Don't worry about it old chap. You'll be fine when you are in the driving seat yourself. I am just the same I can't stand being a passenger myself. Go aft and clean yourself up but don't leave your mask off for too long or you will pass out."

All is well for another 20 minutes as we reach the halfway point and the contrails disappear. "Algy what the bloody hell has happened to the heating? It colder than a winter's day on Frinton seafront." "Sorry skipper but the heating is out in all compartments except the tail turret. You'll need to drop lower or we are all going to get frostbite." "Taking her down now."

Now at 9,000 feet we are below most of the cloud. Parky Lane pipes up, "Couple of Ju88s high above us skipper just stooging around. I don't think that they have spotted us looks like they are stalking some other poor blighter." "Keep your eyes on them Parky." "Turning point coming up skipper. Steer 124 degrees."

As we head closer to the German coast but well beyond the range of their flak I can feel the hairs on the back of my neck bristle. I just know that we are being picked up by their radar but why aren't we seeing any of the nightfighters? Perhaps it is because we are in the first third of the bomber stream or maybe our course change has thrown them off. "Time to change course again skipper if we don't want to bump into the flak on Heligoland. Steer 86 degrees." "Roger."

10/10ths cloud now but no recall. "Enemy coast ahead skipper. Ecky thump that's a reet bit o' flak summons coping." FSgt Wilson's broad tones inform us. "Can anyone translate that into English for the benefit of the rest of us skipper?" "Well, glad to hear that you haven't nodded off back there in the tail Mitch. Now everyone pipe down as this next bit is over land and it might get a bit dicey. Keep your eyes peeled everyone." Although we can see bags of flak to either side of us and well above us it appears that we have managed to slip through undetected.

"Approaching target zone steer 93 NINE THREE degrees skipper." Cloud breaking up 50% coverage. "NUMBER 3 ENGINE ON FIRE" shouts Parky Lane from the MUG. For Pete's sake, not now of all times! "OK fire out and prop feathered. Making the run onto target now." Coming in from the sea we can see fingers of searchlights probing the sky trying to pick out the lead bombers but we manage to escape their unwanted gaze. An Me110F-4 comes in to attack. "Bandit 9 o'clock high." Parky has clearly been eating his carrots and puts in a well aimed burst which splits the fuselage open, shattering the canopy and the pilot doesn't even manage to open his chute.

The flak at our lower altitude is surprisingly light as they seem to be focussing all the attention on the stream above us. Target visibility is mostly obscured and we are off target with a miserable 5% accuracy but negligible thermal turbulence. Time to turn for home. Light flak exiting the target zone but no damage. A Ju88C-6 jumps us on the edge of the target zone sneaking in from 6 o'clock level. Mitch fails to spot him so we aren't able to take avoiding action and take 4 hits:

the first two caused only minor damage but then he got in a long burst causing walking hits from stern to nose. Tail wheel destroyed, superficial damage to the Rear Centre and bomb bay (bombs gone), but Pilot was KIA (shot through orbital surface) & the Flight Engineer's left hand was severed. "Get FO Pascoe up here immediately to take over and get me the first aid kit now!" Algy was able to gasp out over the intercom. FO Fairfax attended to Algy while our passenger was promoted to Pilot. Despite the erratic movement of O Oscar Mitch our tail

gunner manages to hit the JU in the fuel tank which is seen to sprout flames and then dive away narrowly avoiding a collision. PO Pascoe in a steady voice asks, "Everyone else OK? Check for damage and report in." The crew all do so impressed with the coolness of this new boy who an hour ago was vomiting into the Elsan.

Still over Germany north of Hamburg and its murderous flak with 100% cloud cover we avoid detection and make for home.

Even out over the sea the 10/10ths cloud cover persists. "How is FO Moncreif doing?" Asks our new pilot. "I have managed to apply a tourniquet and stop the bleeding and mercifully he passed out." Replied our bomb aimer Gwyn Faifax. "Remember to release it periodically. We don't want him losing his arm as well." "Yes skipper." Everyone is amazed by the confidence of their new pilot who has slipped into the role with such ease. "I have managed to get a good fix skipper," pipes up our Navigator "steer 247 degrees and that should see us all the way home." A quiet half an hour passes and the crew feel the effects of the adrenaline wearing off and the sad fact that they have lost their pilot.

The 10/10ths cloud persists but they can see the Zuider Zee off to their port quarter. "You sneaky bastard ... bandit 9 o'clock high skipper. Break left, break left." So saying Mitch opens fire with the Mid Upper Guns spraying fire at the Dornier 217 in a successful attempt to put him off his aim. The nightfighter banks swiftly without firing and dives away out of the fight.

Now out over the North Sea and safely away from the coast they break out the flasks of cocoa and sandwiches. FO Pascoe looks at the corpse slumped in the cockpit and decides against it. Now that the immediate danger has passed the coolness and determination to take over control when the other needed him has faded and his doubts about his abilities as a pilot and leader of men return. But they had called him skipper and had looked to him when he had just met these men for the first time that afternoon. So come on, let's get the job done.

"Skipper Mitch here. There are a couple of Ju88 Cs stooging around at 12 and 9 o'clock high. They don't look like they know what they are doing and I don't think that they have seen us." "OK keep an eye on them and tell me the minute they look like they're taking an interest in us."

"Skipper - Great Yarmouth ahead just visible through the sea mist. Nearly home." "Flt Sgt Wilson can you whistle up base and let them know that we have an injured man on board and to have the meat wagon ready to greet us. Oh, and try and tell them in an accent that they can understand, that's a good chap."

Ground fog envelopes our base and with the tail wheel out Peter Pascoe is clammy with apprehension. "Mitch I want you to leave the tail turret and move forward for this landing." "Will do skipper." O Oscar makes a reasonable landing trailing sparks from her damaged tailwheel and pulls off the main runway. The meat wagon takes away our wounded crew mate and deals with the stiffened corpse of PO Worthing.

Flt Sgt Henry "Parky" Lane was credited with downing the Me110 F4. FO Algernon Moncreif made a slow recovery and fitted with an artificial hand and although he was offered a discharge chose to remain in the service and retrained as a Ground Controller. Flying Officer Peter Pascoe was mentioned in dispatches for his fortitude in taking over control of the damaged aircraft and took over as Pilot of E Ernest. Pilot Officer Reg Chasuble was appointed as replacement Flight Engineer.

